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ABSTRACT

Advantages and disadvantages to writing behavioral objectives, especially for teachers of language arts, are discussed. The three commonly accepted domains of learnings--cognitive, affective, and psychomotor--are presented in relation to verbs used to indicate learning in those domains. Steps in identifying evidences of learning are: (1) State briefly a broad goal within the given subject field to be achieved by the end of the school experience; (2) Write below it at least two statements of student behaviors that would be evidences that the student has achieved the goal; (3) Check to be sure that all types of learnings appropriate to the stated goal are included in the objectives; and (4) Repeat the process for each broad goal. (DB)

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FROM THE STATE SPECIALIST'S DESK

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Among the games people play is one of polarizing attitudes—polarizing their own positions instantly for or against any issue or fostering polarization of others' opinions by pressuring them into pro or con positions.

The game of polarization, skillfully played, accomplishes the same results as its predecessor, straddling-the-fence. As long as a matter is being argued with vehemence by both extremes, or as long as one has taken a conspicuous stand so that he is being strongly opposed from the other side, he cannot be expected to modify his opinion or cope with the issue. While he waits for "informed" forces to reach some kind of consensus, he may slip unknowingly into acceptance of argument as a substitute for production. It may provide an excuse for rejecting even information. Polarization can immobilize those involved and may well be a sophisticated cop-out.

One of the current topics for the polarization game is the stating of behavioral objectives. True, searching both sides of any issue often uncovers needed information about it. Sheer argument, however, under the guise of such study, can delay confrontation with the issue itself until external forces have once more assumed the inadequacy of educators and determined their fate for them—or supplanted them. So, while the literary battle rages by voice and in print, persons in authority, many of whom have never tried to write performance objectives, are requiring teachers to write them and then be held accountable for their fulfillment during the coming years. Such expectations are attached to the self-evaluation report from the North Central Association, to the applications for Federal funds, and in some schools to daily lesson plans. Also, the nationwide demand for accountability wherever funds are provided is often directed toward the schools.

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In order that teachers may be prepared to meet these demands, the curriculum specialists in the State Department of Education are assisting teachers with writing behavioral objectives. In the doing, they are trying to help teachers to think through the whole concept of such objectives and their applicability to given subject matter areas, to sift out their strengths and weaknesses, and to make appropriate modifications and adaptations.

If the term "behavioral objectives" is to be interpreted to mean that there is no learning without a measurable change in behavior, thereby proving itself in appropriate to much of the humanities area, teachers of the English language arts should make the adjustments necessary to permit the useful elements to serve language teaching and learning. They might replace the term with "desired observable behaviors" and proceed to learn the advantages and pitfalls in identifying such behaviors and to discover how stating them as objectives can assist with teaching-learning in the language arts.

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Discernible advantages might include these:

—Stating objectives in terms of student achievement at the end of a given unit of study rather than in terms of what the teacher will do shifts the focus to the learner. Obviously the teacher needs to know what matter will be studied, what materials used, and what activities included; but what students will do with their experiences is what education is all about.

—Identifying desired observable behaviors causes teachers to decide what desirable language behavior is. What competencies in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and such activities as use of a library are desirable ends? How do habits of rational thought take shape in language? What use of language will contribute to one's being a better family member, citizen, or social and creative person? What language uses would be evidence that one is more aware, perceptive, valuing, empathetic, capable of judgment and of mental and emotional interchange? Here one must make a sharp distinction between this development, which is education, and such a habit as saying "How do you do?" or responding to religious questions with denominational cliches, which is training. Determining desired behaviors suggested here as education is in no way related to planning to make a marionette of a human being. Rather it is a matter of deciding what the observable evidences of educational growth are.

—Determining desired outcomes before study begins gives the teacher a magnetic pole toward which to steer. He may veer to the left or to the right, but he isn't so liable as before to forget himself in chopping an entire forest into kindling to cook one meal. If he does not bring his students closer to the desired behavior by one route, he tries others.

—Using a pretest of some kind, formal or informal, leads toward the long-recommended but seldom-used practice of taking the learner where he is. Regardless of what adjustments the teacher makes in the study unit after the pretest, when he checks the post-test he knows he is evaluating what the student has learned during this unit of study rather than what he recalls from previous experience.

—Stating observable behaviors as desired outcomes is particularly helpful to language arts teachers, whose major effort is in the affective domain. It causes them to think about what they hope will happen as a result of their effort and how they will know when they have accomplished any of it. It causes them to consider the real reasons that teach what they teach, such as "I just love Shakespeare"; "Every child should know what part of speech every word in a sentence is"; "I love to teach grammar"; "Teachers here are rated on how the kids do on standardized tests"; "They're going to study this next year"; or "The State requires that we finish the book and have so-many book reports." When they mention learner accomplishment, they hope that he will express himself well, appreciate literature, understand poetry, or know grammar.

A response to the first group of replies might be that a teacher should see that these answers as contributing factors but should find a genuinely educational purpose for such teaching or discontinue it. In response to the second group, one might say that the purposes are valid as far as they go, though the last one is in error, but might ask what evidences of such achievement might be expected to appear.

—Planning desired learner outcomes provides an opportunity for students to become involved to some degree in constructive self-determination. Very young children help plan their days in school. Older students can, in increasing depth and breadth, think about what they want to be able to do as a result of their study and pass some judgment on their own progress.

—Entirely aside from planning for student learning, knowing how to think and write in terms of behavioral outcomes saves much time and avoids emotional stress for teachers who are requested to do it for someone other than their own students. As accountability nudges the schools and industry offers to take over the teaching and guarantee *training* results, teachers, knowing full well they cannot guarantee *educational* results, can at least state what they are trying to do.

Potential dangers in the stating of behavioral objectives can become realities when the term is interpreted in a strict, behavioristic sense:

—Limiting the teaching-learning experience to what is predetermined for a planned unit enclosed by pretest and post-test tends to preclude intangible, unpredictable learnings—often very valuable ones. Where the post-test draws together the learnings spread out from the pretest, the way must be left open for the unpredictable. Plans should plan for the unplanned.

—Stating objectives in terms of learnings that are measurable in the standard sense of the word may restrict teaching to specifics. By redefinition of terms, some writers state that what is observable is measurable. Teachers of the humanities, for whom the words have different connotations, would do well to use the term that represents *evidence* of desired learning.

—The writing of behavioral objectives can become extremely time consuming if not kept in proper perspective. The more specific and detailed they become, the more time is absorbed in writing them, especially when exact measurement of achievement must be incorporated into each one. It would be unrealistic to declare an arbitrary percentage of time that would be appropriate to the preparation of behavioral objectives for a given unit of study. Suffice it to say that those involved should keep in mind that writing objectives and evaluating accomplishment, important as they are, are only the beginning and the ending. The teaching-learning that goes on between is the vital part and must not be squeezed out of time.

—Placing primary stress on the inclusion of an exact measurement of achievement can lead to the preparation of dozens of objectives on trivia because they can be measured precisely. To avoid this pitfall, one might write two or three general goals accompanied by perhaps five behavioral objectives each to serve as measurable or observable evidences of accomplishment of the stated goals for the unit of study. Then, if one wished to carry it down to lesson plans, two or three measurable specifics per lesson should be enough.

—Much stalling controversy can develop when those working with the objectives are thinking and talking about them at different levels without realizing the discrepancy. From the preceding paragraph it is obvious that there exists a hierarchy of levels of objectives, beginning with general goals for adults—stated either behaviorally or nonbehaviorally—and spreading through various stages to unit objectives and daily achievements. Another hierarchy classifies objectives according to types of learnings from observation to decision making. Constructive discussion can move forward if each person will define his terms as context for his remarks.

There are undoubtedly other advantages and disadvantages to writing behavioral objectives, but these seem to be the most conspicuous and the most relevant for educators.

With this background of varying views of writing performance objectives and a realization that with some adjustments appropriate to a given subject area, the use of such objectives can add a new dimension to their undertakings, teachers can consider brief definitions of the three commonly accepted domains of learnings:

> Cognitive domain = behaviors indicative of mental or intellectual learning, including factual knowledge; appropriately introduced by "the learner can—"; verb usually measurable.
>
> Affective domain = behaviors indicative of attitudes, emotion, values, appreciations, and interests, often characterized by willingness or choice: appropriately introduced by "the learner will"; verb usually observable.
>
> Psychomotor domain = behaviors indicative of neuromuscular or physical skills and dexterity; appropriately introduced by "the learner is able to"; verb usually measurable.

Obviously objectives in the different domains may be less than distinct. One may accompany or be prerequisite to another. For example, if an objective is that "Given free time, the learner will read a story book," the objective is classified as affective because the learner will choose to read in his free time, but he must have the cognitive and psychomotor prerequisites of being able to read and of knowing where and how to get a book he likes.

The verbs most widely accepted as indicating measurable cognitive learnings are distinguish, state (a rule), construct, order (meaning arrange in

order), describe, apply (a rule), name, identify, and demonstrate. These verbs are generally conceded to include all the other cognitive verbs of similar properties. The many others that apply more specifically to performance in given subject areas and are equally measurable—for example, write, cut, define. outline, match, check, select, encircle—are equally acceptable for most purposes.

A list of affective verbs might include choose, comment, participate, respond, ask, improvise, browse, volunteer, discuss, dramatize, and remain silent. They are all observable behaviors determined by some attitude of the learner, choice or willingness.

The affective verbs may often be accompanied by such qualifying adverbs as voluntarily, actively, enthusiastically, widely, frequently. These adverbs sometimes provide the only measurement available for the observable affective behaviors.

For those teachers of the humanities who do, and perhaps should, think first about the long-range intangibles of teaching and learning, there is a way to hold onto them and at the same time respond to the need to identify evidences of learning. Here is a pattern one might follow:

Step 1. State briefly a broad goal within the given subject field—rather long-range, perhaps affective in substance, perhaps non-behavioral in terms—to be achieved by the end of the school experience.

Step 2. Write below it at least two statements of student behaviors that would be evidences that the student has achieved the goal. Include in each of these statements (1) the learner, as grammatical subject; (2) a verb of observable behavior, as predicate; (3) a product as direct object if the verb requires one. If possible give (4) a measure of success, or observability; and (5) a context—a situation, provision, or "given"—which provides the occasion for the behavior. Some teachers find it convenient to provide the stage setting, No. (5), first and then place the performance within it.

Step 3. Using the distinguishing characteristics given above for the three domains, check to be sure that all types of learnings appropriate to the stated goal are included in the objectives.

Step 4. Repeat the process for each broad goal.

To argue whether there is really no learning without change of behavior is to argue learning theory. To debate whether schools can reasonably be expected to state desired learner outcomes as a result of the school experience is to debate whether education itself, formal or informal, can be expected to make any difference to the individual in the way he conducts his life and interacts with other creatures and creations. If there is no observable difference

between one who has had some formal education and one who has not, man had better start his thinking all over again.

On the other hand, not to question the right of society to demand that the schools guarantee to produce results in accordance with their ideals is to require of the schools what neither churches nor jails have been able to produce.

At this point, to expend vital energies on the game of debating the matter rather than coping with it is to confirm society's suspicion that educators can only talk but cannot come to grips with any issue. Educators had better be about education's business.

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